



New Zealand

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country is an island nation with an area of approximately 99,000 square miles, and its population is an estimated four million. The religious composition of the country is predominantly Christian, but diversity continues to increase. According to the 2001 census, approximately 55 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian or as affiliated members of individual Christian denominations. Three major Christian denominations--the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches--continued to experience a decline in membership between 1996 and 2001, while the Roman Catholic Church showed a slight increase. The Maori Christian churches, which integrate Christian tenets with pre-colonial Maori beliefs and include Ratana and Ringatu, experienced significant growth. The number of Pentecostals declined by approximately 19 percent between 1996 and 2001, to less than 1 percent of the population. During the same period, non-Christian religions continued to show strong growth rates, driven primarily by immigration. Hindus and Buddhists each account for approximately 1 percent of the population; other non-Christian religions each account for less than 1 percent.

According to 2001 census data, the following were the numbers and percentages of the population's religious affiliation: No religion, 26.8 percent; Anglican, 15.2 percent; Roman Catholic, 12.7 percent; Presbyterian, 10.9 percent; objected to answering the question, 6.2 percent; did not state affiliation, 5.5 percent; Christian (no more specific identification), 5 percent; Methodist, 3.1 percent; Baptist, 1.3 percent; Ratana (a Maori/Christian group with services in the Maori language), 1.3 percent; Buddhist, 1.1 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 1 percent; and Hindu, 1 percent. In addition, there were more than 90 religious groups represented that each constituted less than 1 percent of the population. The indigenous Maori (approximately 15 percent of the population) tend to be followers of Presbyterianism, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), or Maori Christian faiths such as Ratana and Ringatu.

The Auckland statistical area, which accounts for roughly 30 percent of the country's total population, exhibits the greatest religious diversity. Farther south on the North Island, and on the South Island, the percentage of citizens who identified themselves with Christian faiths increased, while those affiliated with non-Christian religions decreased.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Education Act of 1964 specifies in its "secular clause" that teaching within public primary schools "shall be entirely of a secular character"; however, it also permits religious instruction and observances in state primary schools within certain parameters. If the school committee in consultation with the principal or head teacher so determines, any class may be closed at any time of the school day within specified limits for the purposes of religious instruction given by voluntary instructors. However, attendance at religious instruction or observances is not compulsory. According to the Legal Division of the Ministry of

Education, public secondary schools also may permit religious instruction at the discretion of their individual school boards. The Ministry of Education does not keep centralized data on how many individual primary or secondary schools permit religious instruction or observances; however, a curriculum division spokesperson maintained that religious instruction, if it occurs at a particular school, usually is scheduled after normal school hours.

Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act of 1975, the Government, in response to a burgeoning general primary school role and financial difficulties experienced by a large group of Catholic parochial schools, permitted the incorporation of private schools into the public school system. Designated as "integrated schools," they were deemed to be of a "unique character" and were permitted to receive public funding provided that they allowed space for nonpreference students (students who do not fit within the "unique character" of the school; for example, non-Catholic students who attend a Catholic school). A total of 325 of the 2,646 primary schools are integrated schools with this designation. As of July 2004, there were 238 Catholic schools and a handful of non-Christian or nonreligious schools, such as Islamic, Hare Krishna, or Rudolph Steiner (a school of spiritual philosophy) integrated into the public school system. Students cannot be required to attend an integrated school; admission to integrated schools is based on the student's request.

Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter are official holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, some businesses are fined if they attempt to operate on the official holidays of Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. ANZAC day is the fourth and only nonreligious holiday that carries similar fines. The small but growing non-Christian communities have called for the Government to take into account the country's increasingly diverse religious makeup and offer greater holiday flexibility. In response, the Government acted to remove some constraints on trade associated with the Christian faith. In 2001, the Government enacted new legislation that permits several types of businesses to remain open on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. These businesses include those providing essential supplies, convenience items, and food and drink. Many other businesses are fined if they attempt to operate on these Christian holidays.

The Government does not require licenses or registration to recognize a religious group. However, if a religious group wishes to collect money for the promotion of religion or other charitable causes and wishes to be recognized by the Inland Revenue Department (IRD), then it must register with the IRD as a charitable trust to obtain tax benefits. There is no fee for this registry.

The country has two registered Christian political parties. There are no other religiously affiliated parties, although the law does not prevent the registration of parties based on other religions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Incidents of religiously motivated violence are extremely rare. Due to the infrequency of their occurrence and difficulties in clearly establishing such motivations, the police do not attempt to maintain data on crimes that may have been motivated by religion.

In August and September 2004, headstones of Jewish graves were destroyed or desecrated in and around Wellington and Wanganui. In one of the incidents in the Wellington area, a Jewish prayer house was burned down. The Government strongly condemned these actions. In late September 2004, racist letters, some containing pork fragments, were mailed to members of Wellington's Somali community and other Muslims. The heads of the city's Muslim and Jewish communities were quick to proclaim their belief that both the anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim attacks were the work of someone outside their communities who wished to incite tension between the two groups. In October 2004, a person was charged with sending the letters, and a trial was scheduled for July 2005.

The government-funded Human Rights Commission actively promoted tolerance and anti-bias on the issue of religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy regularly includes representatives from a wide range of religious faiths at its sponsored events. The Embassy also maintains contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities.

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<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/index.htm>